Lesson 2: Chinese Dynasties

Sui, Tang, and Song Dynasties
China had almost 400 years of unrest. Then the Sui dynasty united China in 589. The Sui set up a canal system. Later these canals carried water throughout China. The Tang dynasty followed. It was one of China’s greatest dynasties. Empress Wu Hou was part of this dynasty. She was China’s first female ruler. Under Wu Hou’s rule, government workers had to pass a civil service examination. The invention of block printing let people reprint pages. Paper money was printed. Trade grew and China had more contact with different Asian cultures. After the Tang dynasty lost power, China had 50 years of war and dishonest leaders. In 960 the Song dynasty reunited China. It established a central government. Trade was very important to China’s economy at this time. People discovered how to make iron in a better way. Farm workers used the iron plow to produce more crops. Iron was also used to build bridges and armor for soldiers. Soldiers first used gunpowder during Song rule.

Mongol and Ming Dynasties
Genghis Khan was a warrior. In 1206 he united nomadic, or wandering, groups from northern Asia. This formed a unified Mongolia. Genghis Khan was named ruler. He used terror to expand his empire. Genghis Khan formed a fierce army. This army defeated the people of northern China and Persia. Genghis Khan died in 1227. His sons expanded the empire. Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan. He conquered southern China and Burma by 1280. This began the Mongol, or Yuan, dynasty. Kublai Khan was the first non-Chinese ruler of China. The Mongols improved the lands they conquered. They improved roads and water travel. They made sure that traders could travel safely. They knew that trade brought wealth to the empire. By 1368 the Ming dynasty came into power. Under Ming rule there were great achievements in the sciences and arts. Ming emperors wanted better protection against invaders. They strengthened the Great Wall. The Forbidden City was the name of the emperor’s palace. It was built between 1406 and 1421. It was located in Beijing. The Forbidden City was made up of hundreds of buildings surrounded by high walls. Only the highest government officials could enter. During the Ming dynasty, Chinese people believed that their culture was the greatest in the world.

China Explores
The Ming Dynasty was a time of exploration. Zheng He was a Chinese explorer during the Ming dynasty. He led several expeditions to Southeast and Southwest Asia, India, and Africa. The Ming emperor supported the expeditions. He filled the ships with riches. The emperor told Zheng He to give them as gifts to the people he met on his voyages. The emperor wanted foreigners to see China as wealthy and powerful. He also hoped that other countries would send representatives to China. Some countries did send representatives to China. However the emperor died. The expeditions stopped by 1433. Under a new emperor, China soon cut itself off from the rest of the world. Foreigners were no longer welcome in China.
Lesson 2: Review

1. **Main Idea and Details** Fill in the missing details below.

   The Mongol dynasty made several improvements in China.
   - China was safe for travelers.
   - [Blank]
   - [Blank]

2. Identify some of the contributions made by Chinese dynasties.

   [List of contributions]

3. Where and what is the Forbidden City?

   [Description of the Forbidden City]

4. What was the purpose behind Zheng He’s expeditions abroad?

   [Purpose of Zheng He’s expeditions]

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Inferences** What benefits might government officials have if positions in China were based on examination results, rather than family ties?

   [Reasons for benefits of examination-based positions]